

**Address by Karel De Gucht,  
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Royal Institute for International Relations, Brussels  
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Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to welcome you today to this seminar devoted to the OSCE and to security through dialogue. This seminar concurrently commemorates the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Helsinki Process and the start of Belgium's OSCE chairmanship. May your work prove productive and help to enlighten the Chairmanship on the tasks that lie ahead.

After a year filled with challenges, I find the OSCE to be in better shape than in the beginning of 2005. There is greater awareness today of what the OSCE represents and what its multidimensional remit can do for peace and stability in Europe.

Our organisation has these past thirty years proved instrumental in bridging the great divide of the cold war in Europe. We have developed a body of commitments, standards and principles that bind us. This is in turn essential for modern collective security in the widest sense of the term. I should therefore like reiterate, from the outset, my deep attachment to the underpinning principles and standards of the OSCE.

I must also point out that security is not achieved once and for all, but is something that requires unwavering attention, continued investment and common responsibility. Stability, peace and security lie at the very heart of the OSCE.

The changes that have occurred since the creation of the OSCE have been monumental and, in large measure, positive. The risk of a new, major war on the European continent has all but disappeared. But security and stability in Europe remain an ongoing concern for the OSCE. For one, because there can be no lasting peace and stability without respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms, the rule of law and democracy. Similarly, there can be no prospects for effective and lasting democracy without stability, nor sustained stability without economic development. And that is why all requisite attention must be focused on each of these three dimensions – the political/military, economic and human – in a global approach to security such as that of the OSCE.

Frozen conflicts are obstacles to lasting peace and development. The time has come to make headway on long-lasting solutions. The same applies to narrow nationalism and short-sighted particularism. These must be transcended in the name of a regional or sub-regional vision capable of guaranteeing the future of one and all. There are prospects in Southern Caucasus, in particular. A future of peace and prosperity is possible for OSCE countries. I was able to observe as much myself last week during my tour of Armenia and Azerbaijan. It is a matter of will and political vision. It is a long-term undertaking, one that far exceeds the term of one chairmanship.

There are many sources of insecurity. Although diffuse, they are alarming nonetheless, starting with terrorism, whether or not linked to organised crime. The threat is not new, but owing to its current global dimension, and the technological

means and resources at its disposal, it has become so terrifying that, unlike traditional threats, it cannot be pinned down to state level nor can it be foreseen.

There is a real danger that the wheels of government will get infiltrated by organised crime, as there is discernible collusion between terrorism and crime. Large-scale crime henceforth appears as a sort of international endeavour supported by relays at state level. Against this background, frozen conflicts clearly constitute an aggravating factor, in that they perpetuate the status quo in areas where the rule of law has collapsed. The fight against these new scourges necessarily entails the rule of law, governance and international solidarity, beginning, naturally, with regional solidarity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are living in a global, multi-regional society, in which the OSCE is an important component -- more important in fact than the participating countries might think. The OSCE comprises the widest idea of Europe ever, to the extent of transcending Europe's geographic and territorial reality. It is a collection of European areas: Euro-Atlantic, Euro-Asian and on to the Pacific Ocean.

The OSCE is necessarily a polymorphous institution. Part of its characteristic trait goes back to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus on the world stage. This is a development that no one could have predicted twenty years ago, and yet one that is now of fundamental importance for the European balance.

The OSCE is moreover characterised by a complex development stemming from the rapidly changing political and strategic context in recent years, and the diversity of the regional processes that have emerged in response thereto: NATO,

OECD, the European Common Market, and finally the European Union and the Council of Europe. The OSCE has subscribed to this architecture with the handicap that its political objectives – save for the launch of a rapprochement process – have never been spelled out in a treaty. Whence the ever recurring question as to its nature and role in the Europe of today. The “European Platform for Security” on cooperation between European institutions, approved in 1999, has shed some clarity. But it does not suffice to elucidate the operational objectives of the OSCE.

The *raison d’être* of the OSCE and its rather unstructured *modus operandi* can be explained in part by the unfinished nature of a European architecture, characterised by a certain vagueness that we must learn to manage constructively and with the requisite imagination.

This does not mean that the OSCE is in competition with other organisations. Nor is it the added sum of the various European organisations, or their proxy or spokesperson to the outside world. It makes no sense to wish to compare it with NATO. Nor was it established to impose peace pursuant to Chapter VII of the UN Charter. It has no legislative or legal apparatus as does the Council of Europe, nor does it wish to imitate the EU or to become a political union.

So what is the OSCE? It is first and foremost an organisation “*sui generis*,” unique of its kind. Its role is no longer to manage the division of Europe, but to bring the different parts thereof together – especially those that are not slated for integration in the European Union – in an immense continental area, around a certain philosophy of Europe and its values and principles. In essence, the OSCE is a conception of the rule of law. It is the Europe of values rather than the Europe of peoples, states or governments.

The OSCE must be judged by what it is -- not by what it is not or cannot be. People often tend to focus on the weaknesses of the OSCE, but less often on its winning assets. For my part, I can see various such assets.

First of all, there is the multidisciplinary and versatile nature of the OSCE's approach. It is rather difficult to continue to speak about the three Helsinki baskets nowadays. The challenges facing the organisation are multiform and multidimensional and therefore require a multidisciplinary approach, specific to the OSCE, more than to other organisations.

Secondly, in its diversity, the OSCE comprises various countries and institutions that can cooperate. The OSCE can and must serve as a mobilising forum in this regard. Although a regional organisation pursuant to Chapter VIII of the UN Charter since 1991, the OSCE has in many respects remained the Conference it was in 1975. It more than makes up for any shortcomings in efficacy that the organisation may have because it lacks centralised structures, by capitalising fully on its dimension as a political forum, thereby making the most of the "intergovernmental conference" dimension. The OSCE provides a frame of reference of shared values which affords member states an opportunity to seek solutions to political problems together.

Thirdly, the OSCE has acquired extensive experience in the field, for instance in Kosovo and Central Asia, through its missions and specialised institutions. I believe that the OSCE still has an important role to play in Kosovo, with regard to the status that the region will be accorded in the end. It is therefore important to involve the OSCE in an efficient manner in the negotiations from the outset.

The OSCE is in many respects an irreplaceable organisation, one which, precisely because it lacks a rigid structure, fits perfectly in the new regionalism that can be defined as

extensive European Cooperation. All entities are called upon to play their role in a European architecture that can be adjusted according to the obligations that they are prepared to accept within the institutions of which they are members. This is how the OSCE can respond at a given moment to the development of greater Europe.

In concrete terms, this means that the OSCE is compelled, by its very nature, as it were, to have a complicated structure. It also means that to be able to sustain its dynamism as an organisation, and at the same time to secure the coherence of its actions, the OSCE must manage to combine a sufficiently centralised structure round the Permanent Council with sufficient autonomy for its executive structures and satellite institutions, in particular the ODHIR, the High Commissioner on National Minorities and the Representative on Freedom of the Media.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Sovereignty has admittedly become a relative concept, in particular owing to the multilateral level, as well as the globalisation, of the economy. This multilateral approach to the exercise of sovereignty is how it should be. The EU Member States are living proof thereof. The process of European integration has helped to transcend conflicts that seemed beyond solution to our elders. The OSCE must make its contribution towards maturing mentalities. I am thinking here also of the growing importance of what are known as non-governmental organisations. NGOs are today fully-fledged, important players in international life. The OSCE has actually played a driving role in this process – and a fine role it has been. For there can be no viable democracy without a civil society.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to underscore that one capital mission of the OSCE – its core activity, as is often said – is to prevent and to solve conflicts. This must be a priority task, not

only for the Chairmanship, but also for the Council. For it concerns the very credibility of the organisation. The OSCE has certain instruments that enable it to act upstream and downstream of conflicts. And yet it must be able to bring a decisive political weight to bear in solving the conflicts themselves. The debates in the Council most open up prospects, which is something completely different from monitoring the temperature of frozen conflicts. It is in any event, in this positive and political spirit that Belgium will assume its responsibilities in the Chairmanship, mindful that success is never guaranteed, but also fully aware that without a major political investment from each and every one of us, it is simply out of reach.

I thank you.